



Friends of White's Woods Monthly Newsletter



April

APRIL WEBINAR: PENNSYLVANIA NATURAL HERITAGE OLD GROWTH PROJECT

The Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program (PNHP) is a partnership between the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources (DCNR), the Pennsylvania Fish and Boat Commission (PFBC), the Pennsylvania Game Commission (PGC), and the Western Pennsylvania Conservancy (WPC) in cooperation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. PNHP is a member of NatureServe, an international network of natural heritage programs that gather and provide information on the location and status of important ecological resources (plants, vertebrates, invertebrates, ecological communities and geologic features). The purpose is to provide current, reliable, objective ecological data and analysis to help guide conservation work and land-use planning.

Currently, PNHP is engaged in identifying second-growth forests in the state to become Old Growth Forests.

According to the website, The Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Program is working on understanding the old growth character for Pennsylvania's forests, and then identifying secondary forests that are attaining this character for protection.

The program is working to map old forests in Pennsylvania and learn more about the plant communities associated with them.

This webinar will give an overview of PNHP and walk through the process of identifying, documenting, and reporting the biodiversity of Pennsylvania to the public. There will be specific examples from the latest regional natural heritage inventory project highlighting Natural Heritage Areas (NHAs), which represent the primary



products that PNHP provides for municipalities and organizations to make informed decisions within their jurisdiction. Current PNHP projects that involve old growth forests in Pennsylvania and

climate change vulnerability of the Pennsylvania's biodiversity will be covered including how PNHP is working to increase resiliency through habitat connectivity.

Dr. Scott Schuette, PNHP botany program manager, will present the April 27th webinar. Dr. Schuette has worked with the Pennsylvania Natural Heritage program for 11 years as an inventory botanist and bryologist. He currently serves as the Natural Heritage Botany Program Manager at Western Pennsylvania Conservancy. He received his PhD in plant biology from Southern Illinois University. His projects focus on rare plant inventories, climate change impacts to plant species, and bryophyte inventory and conservation.

See below to register for this webinar, which will be held from 4 to 5 p.m.



Celebrate Earth Day 2023 at White's Woods

Plan to arrive between 1 and 3 p.m., Saturday, April 22, at the 12th Street entrance to White's Woods.

The first 100 people who arrive can claim up to two oak seedlings (distributed courtesy of the MILLION TREES PROJECT). Walkers can also claim an Earth Day sticker or bookmark and meet members from Indiana Conservation Groups, including Friends of White's Woods, the Evergreen Conservancy, IUP Sustainability Studies, Federation of Democratic Women of Indiana County (Pollinator Garden), the Indiana County Conservation District, and the Sierra Club. Other valuable community groups, including the Indiana County Humane Society, and IUP Coalition for Christian Outreach are planning to greet walkers as well. There will be music (Grist for the Mill will be there!) and conversation! More details about the 12th Street Walk to White's Woods will be forthcoming in the next few weeks.

Next *Naturally* Column in the *Indiana Gazette*

The third *Naturally* column, sponsored by FWW and the *Indiana Gazette*, appeared in the March 25/26 weekend edition.

Titled *Reaching to the Heavens with Majestic Tulip Poplars*, the article is written by Dr. Dana Driscoll, a professor of English at IUP who has been teaching wild food foraging, herbalism and sustainable living for more than 10 years. Read about this ancient tree that existed some 70 million to 100 million years ago.

Missed the first two columns?

The first column appeared Jan. 28th, the second March 4/5. You can read the first two columns at <https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/general-7-1>.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

April 20: White Township Stewardship Committee meeting. 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building.

April 22: Earth Day Celebration. White's Woods. 1 p.m. to 3 p.m. 12th Street entrance.

April 27: Natural Heritage Inventories and Pennsylvania Natural Heritage Old Growth Project. Dr. Scott Schuette, Botany Program Manager, PNHP.

May 18: White Township Stewardship Committee meeting. 6:30 p.m., White Township Municipal Building.

May 25: "Tree Diversity Study of White's Woods Nature Center." Dr. Marion Holmes, University of Pittsburgh's Kuebbing Lab.

The webinars, offered via Zoom from 4 to 5 p.m., are free and open to the public. To register for a webinar, send an email to info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org. Recordings of all webinars are available at [friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events](https://www.friendsofwhiteswoods.org/events)

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MARCH STEWARDSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING LOOKS TO ESTABLISH PRIORITIES, WRAP UP WORK

The March 16th White Township Stewardship agenda indicated that the first item of committee business would be a “Re-cap of expert presentations: What we learned.” Committee Chair Hauge announced that, prior to the meeting, she had asked committee member Sierra Davis to present a 30-minute PowerPoint presentation of Ms. Davis’ own record, or recollection, of key “takeaways” from each committee consultant presentation since August 2022. Topics included various insects, including ticks, demonstration deer exclosure fencing, the problems with allowing light on the forest floor, the Old Growth Forest Network, carbon sequestration contracts, the health of the overstory, the lack of diversity in the understory, the need to leave the overstory intact, types and areas of concentration of invasive plants, types of native plants, the problems in the understory caused by deer browse, climate change, and approaches to passive management.

During her presentation, Davis requested that other committee members fill in missing details. Committee member Dave Dahlheimer mentioned that he had presumed that the most useful approach for moving the committee forward would include identification of areas in which consultants shared perspectives. Hauge asked Dahlheimer and Davis to prepare a list for presentation at the committee’s April 20th meeting of those items or issues related to White’s Woods in which there was consensus among consultants.

Hauge introduced the discussion of completion of the committee’s work regarding the White’s Woods Stewardship plan by distributing two documents: the Duff Park Stewardship Plan Table of Contents and a Millbrook March Nature Center two-page summary of priorities. Hauge suggested that given the timeline for completion of the committee’s work that was laid out by the White Township Board of Supervisors, the Duff Park model seemed far too in-depth and comprehensive to be of use. If the committee were to work effectively to meet their June 2023 deadline, then a brief summary of priorities seemed more likely to work, Hauge indicated. Committee member Matt Klunk commented that producing a short list of priorities was an interesting idea. Davis and Dahlheimer expressed concern that it might not be in the best interest of the township to hurry the process. Dahlheimer suggested that the committee take a much closer look at other stewardship plans. Davis suggested that one way to speed the process along might be to hire someone to write the plan, though the committee should work with the public to identify the plan’s priorities. White Township Recreation

Director Ryan Shaffer stated that, should the committee decide to work with an outside writing consultant, the usual practice for the township is to post a Request for Proposals.

In other business, the committee discussed a March 8th letter from FWW that explained ecological sampling methods and urged the committee to recommend management of White’s Woods be transferred to a land trust. At a previous meeting, Shaffer had indicated that he did not believe that the township would be willing to pay for deer fencing, even if consultants saw that as a necessary step for controlling deer browse. Land trusts, FWW’s letter emphasized, have both the resources and expertise required to care for a natural area.

In a discussion of “Future Experts,” Dahlheimer raised concerns about the committee’s recent process for issuing invitations to consultants: voting to indicate a preference to speak with a consultant, asking a committee member to “reach” out to the professional to ask if they might hold space in their calendar, and then, at a subsequent committee discussion, deciding that they don’t wish to talk to the person after all. Dahlheimer suggested that such an approach was disrespectful of the time of busy professionals. Hauge indicated that she didn’t see Dahlheimer’s concern as a big deal.

Hauge urged the committee to invite Dr. Susan Boser to assist the committee in public outreach at Nature Palooza, described in 2022 information as “a fun day at Blue Spruce Park.”

Hauge mentioned, in response to an article sent to the committee by Dahlheimer titled “Forester vs. Ecologist,” that she had sent the article to commercial/industrial-trained foresters Calvin Norman and Mike Wolf and asked them for their thoughts. Both foresters, Hauge reported, emphasized that they would do only what “the landowner” asked them to do. Hauge asserted the committee needs to work with a full-range of experts, including traditional foresters. Dahlheimer urged the committee to focus on an ecological perspective.

The meeting included Public Comment by Will Radell, who urged the committee to be aware of biblical cautions about destroying nature; Tom Miller, who urged that FWW be given credit for all the surveys, inventories, and other information provided to the committee regarding White’s Woods; and Sara King, who urged the committee to take action to protect fragile trails and at-risk species.

Members and other interested parties should attend these meetings to assure that the committee’s report reflects the views of the public.

Finding Correct Experts for White’s Woods

What is a forest? For some, it is complex set of interlocking ecosystems in which trees are the dominant, or largest, species. For many, forests serve primarily as a crop, providing revenue for the owner and much-needed wood for wood products for human use. In 2019, our state exported over \$1.1 billion dollars’ worth of logs, furniture, and paper products to other countries. The lumber industry is a big part of the Pennsylvania economy.

But does every forest have to be part of this economy? Of course not. Forests like the White’s Woods Nature Center were intentionally set aside to remain largely in a “natural state,” specifically not to be used for timber-production. DCNR recently adopted a strategy to promote old-growth forest systems on at least 20% of state forest lands. Why? Because “ecosystem management concepts and principles should serve as the fundamental basis for the management of public and private forest lands in the Commonwealth,” declares the Penn’s Woods Strategic Plan.

We need more, older forests. Not just because such forests provide extraordinary opportunities for human experience and education - which they do. It is simply wonderful to be in a natural area. But having older, bigger forests is important for ecosystems, too.

Who should manage a natural area such as White’s Woods? A search turns up qualifications such as: “a background in land stewardship, resource management, biology, ecology, or traditional ecological knowledge,” “master’s degree in conservation,” “a master’s degree in environmental, physical, or biological sciences.”

A traditional forester wouldn’t be your first pick to manage a natural area because a forester’s primary training, job experience, and professional associations are geared to equip them to work in Pennsylvania’s large lumber industry. An industrial forester may know nothing about the underground mycelium network or the role of volunteers in managing public lands’ invasive plants. A natural area manager’s first thought must be to work with natural succession. Maybe one can find a forester who eschews timbering as a “go-to” management option in favor of an ecological perspective. But such ecological concerns and public lands practices are rarely central to a forester’s usual work.

Ecological forest management relies on natural systems, such as natural succession, as the basis for managing forests. Traditional “production” foresters rely on “agronomic” and economic factors - farming principals and rate of return.

The long-term protection of White’s Woods requires that the experts who “manage” our community forest both understand and have a habit of relying on natural forest succession processes. The Township Stewardship Committee needs to know that both the management “perspective” and the experts consulted are extremely important concerns. FWW member presence at White Township Stewardship Committee meetings is an opportunity to make these important points to the committee.

For more information, visit: friendsofwhiteswoods.org

**We welcome feedback. Email us at:
info@friendsofwhiteswoods.org**

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